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ABSTRACT

This "Indicator of the Month" from the National Center for Educational Statistics presents data on American children's participation in preprimary education. In addition to data tables, key findings are summarized: (1) preprimary enrollment rates for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds were higher in 1996 than in 1991--in 1996, 37 percent of 3-year-olds, 58 percent of 4-year-olds, and 90 percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary education; (2) in 1996, similar percentages of White and Black 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in center-based programs, while their Hispanic peers were less likely to be enrolled; (3) three- and four-year-olds from families with incomes of more than $50,000 were more likely than 3- and 4-year-olds from families with incomes of $50,000 or less to be enrolled in preprimary education; and (4) there was a positive relationship between parents' educational attainment and the enrollment rates of 3- and 4-year-olds; as parents' educational attainment increased, so did enrollment rates of their children. (EV)

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INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Preprimary education enrollment

January 1999

Participating in early childhood programs such as Head Start, nursery school, prekindergarten, and kindergarten can better prepare a child to enter first grade. Many policymakers and educators believe that it is important to help all children start elementary school on an equal footing with other children. Involving students in preprimary programs beginning at earlier ages may provide these students with valuable experiences that will help them start elementary school better prepared to learn.

- Preprimary enrollment rates for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds were higher in 1996 than in 1991. In 1996, 37 percent of 3-year-olds, 58 percent of 4-year-olds, and 90 percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary education.
- In 1996, similar percentages of white and black 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in center-based programs, while their Hispanic peers were less likely to be enrolled.
- Three- and 4-year-olds from families with incomes of more than $50,000 were more likely than 3- and 4-year-olds from families with incomes of $50,000 or less to be enrolled in preprimary education.
- There was a positive relationship between parents' educational attainment and the enrollment rates of 3- and 4-year-olds: as parents' educational attainment increased, so did the preprimary enrollment rates of their children. However, enrollment rates of 5-year-olds were similar, regardless of their parents' educational attainment.

Percentage of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds enrolled in center-based programs or kindergarten, by selected student characteristics: 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1996

Selected student characteristics	3-year-olds				4-year-olds				5-year-olds			
	1991	1993	1995	1996	1991	1993	1995	1996	1991	1993	1995	1996
Total	**31.4**	**34.1**	**37.4**	**36.7**	**52.7**	**55.3**	**60.9**	**57.7**	**86.4**	**90.0**	**90.3**	**90.2**
Race/ethnicity												
White	33.4	33.7	40.2	39.6	52.4	53.7	60.8	58.8	85.7	88.9	88.6	88.8
Black	31.6	41.9	41.1	40.5	57.4	62.9	68.2	67.8	92.3	93.2	93.7	94.1
Hispanic	19.8	27.2	21.2	22.1	47.5	48.9	49.0	45.3	85.3	91.4	93.4	90.4
Household income												
$10,000 or less	25.4	32.7	26.2	26.0	43.3	52.6	54.3	52.7	86.1	89.2	90.9	92.7
10,001–20,000	23.2	21.6	27.0	28.0	45.0	47.2	52.3	45.3	84.6	90.4	89.7	87.6
20,001–35,000[1]	21.3	22.2	27.7	30.8	48.0	47.8	49.7	50.6	85.1	86.8	90.7	87.8
35,001–50,000[1]	33.4	37.9	38.1	42.2	52.3	57.2	59.5	58.2	87.3	90.6	88.5	89.7
50,001 or more	52.9	58.7	61.2	55.0	74.8	73.2	80.7	75.8	89.0	93.7	90.9	92.8
Parents' highest education level												
Less than high school diploma	17.3	17.1	16.0	[2]22.0	33.1	42.8	[2]42.4	[2]47.3	85.5	79.9	92.5	90.3
High school diploma or GED	23.0	23.0	26.3	28.9	40.8	43.2	51.1	47.3	84.8	89.0	89.2	89.9
Some college/vocational/technical	31.0	35.9	35.6	34.5	56.3	61.1	63.3	59.8	87.7	91.1	90.2	88.6
Bachelor's degree	41.5	41.1	51.7	49.6	67.2	64.1	70.7	62.6	88.1	92.5	91.6	92.6
Graduate/professional school	53.0	61.9	[2]60.8	60.4	72.0	73.3	77.9	78.1	87.0	94.3	89.8	92.1
Family structure												
Two biological or adoptive parents	—	34.4	38.6	38.0	—	55.1	61.3	57.8	—	89.1	88.8	89.0
One biological or adoptive parent	—	33.8	36.9	37.3	—	57.2	63.0	58.4	—	92.1	94.0	91.9
One biological/adoptive and one step parent	—	[2]32.7	[2]23.1	[2]14.7	—	[2]49.5	[2]46.9	[2]45.8	—	87.3	89.4	93.2
Other relatives	—	[2]34.8	[2]20.8	[2]23.1	—	[2]52.2	[2]61.3	[2]55.9	—	[2]92.6	[2]88.0	96.5

— Not available.

[1] The middle two income ranges in 1991 were $20,001–30,000 and $30,001–50,000, respectively.

[2] Interpret with caution; standard errors are large due to small sample sizes.

NOTE: Included in the total but not shown separately are children from other racial/ethnic groups and other types of family structures. This analysis includes children ages 3–5 who were not enrolled in first grade. Age is as of December 31 of the prior year.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1991 (Early Childhood Education File), 1993 (School Readiness File), 1995 (Early Childhood Program Participation File), and 1996 (Parent and Family Involvement in Education File).

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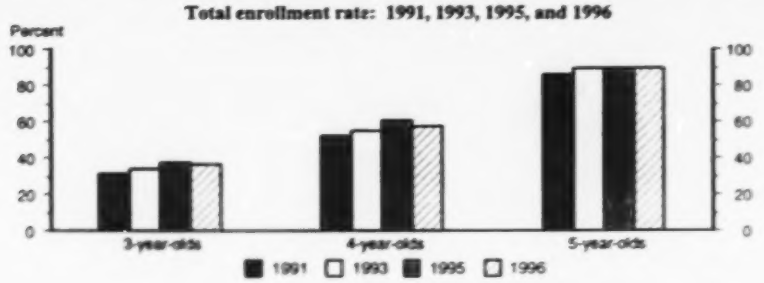
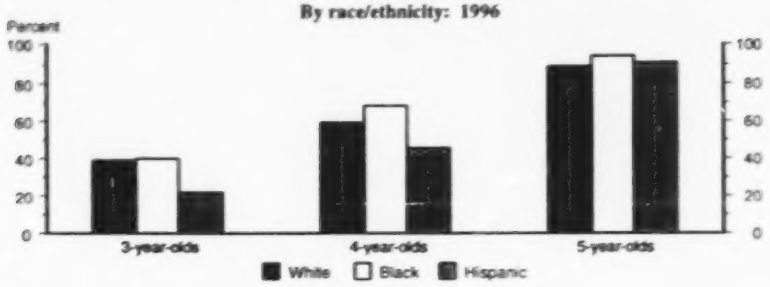
Percentage of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds enrolled in center-based programs or kindergarten

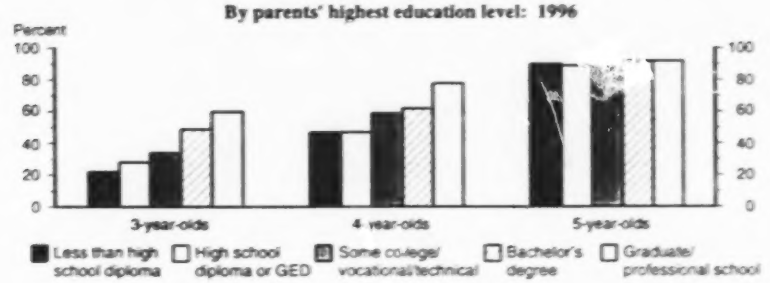
Total enrollment rate: 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1996



By race/ethnicity: 1996



By parents' highest education level: 1996



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